A

SERMON

ON

NUMBERS XXiii. 23.

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Preached MONDAY, April 21, 1777.

ON LAYING THE

Foundation of the New Chapel,

NEAR THE

CITY-ROAD, *LONDON.*

By *JOHN WESLEY*, M. A.

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NUMBERS xxiii. 23.

According to this time it ſhall be ſaid, What hath God wrought!

1. WE need not now enquire, in what ſenſe this was applicable to the children of Iſrael. It may be of more uſe to conſider in what ſenſe the words are applicable to ourſelves: how far the people of England have reaſon to ſay, "*According to this time, what hath God wrought!*"

2. A great man, indeed, who I truſt is now in a better world, Dr. *Gibſon*, late lord biſhop of London, in one of his charges to his clergy flatly denies, That God has wrought any "extraordinary work" in our nation: nay affirms, that to imagine any ſuch thing, is no better than down right enthuſiaſm. It is ſo, if his lordſhip's ſuppoſition is true, if God has not wrought any extraordinary work. But if he really has, then we may believe and aſſert it, without incurring any ſuch imputation.

3. Yet a ſtill greater man of a neighbouring nation, a burning and a ſhining light,

equally eminent in piety and in learning, partly confirmed the biſhop's ſuppoſition. For Bengelius being aſked, Why he placed the grand revival of religion ſo late as the year 1836, replied, "I acknowledge all the prophecies would incline me to place it a century ſooner. But an inſurmountable difficulty lies in the way: I cannot reconcile this to matter of fact. For I do not know of any remarkable work of God, which has been wrought upon earth between the years 1730 and 1740." This is really ſurpriſing. It is ſtrange, that ſenſible men ſhould know ſo little of what is done at ſo ſmall a diſtance. How could ſo great a man be ignorant of what was tranſacted no farther off than England? Eſpecially conſidering the accounts then publiſhed in Germany, ſome of which were tolerably impartial: nay, conſidering the particular account which I had ſent as early as the year 1742, to one well known through all the empire, Paſtor (afterwards Superintendent) Steinmetz.

4. "But has there indeed been any extraordinary work of God wrought in England during this century?" This is an important queſtion: it is certainly worthy of our ſerious conſideration. And it is capable of being anſwered to the full ſatisfaction of every fair enquirer. He may eaſily be informed, what work it is, and in what manner it has been wrought? It is true, I am in one reſpect an improper perſon to give this information; as it will oblige me frequently to ſpeak of myſelf, which may have the

the appearance of oſtentation. But with regard to this, I can only caſt myſelf upon the candor of my hearers, being perſuaded they will put the moſt favourable conſtruction upon what is not a matter of choice, but of neceſſity. For there is no other perſon, if I decline the taſk, who can ſupply my place, who has a perfect knowledge of the work in queſtion, from the beginning of it to this day.

We may conſider, Firſt, The riſe and progreſs of this work: Secondly, The nature of it.

I. 1. As to the riſe of it. In the year 1725, a young ſtudent at Oxford was much affected by reading Kempis's Chriſtian Pattern, and Biſhop Taylor's Rules of Holy Living and Dying. He found an earneſt deſire to live according to thoſe rules, and to flee from the wrath to come. He ſought for ſome that would be his companions in the way; but could find none: ſo that for ſeveral years he was conſtrained to travel alone, having no man either to guide or to help him. But in the year 1729 he found one who had the ſame deſire. They then endeavoured to help each other, and in the cloſe of the year were joined by two more. They ſoon agreed to ſpend two or three hours together every ſunday evening. Afterwards they ſat two evenings together, and in a while ſix evenings in the week: ſpending that time in reading the ſcriptures, and provoking one another to love and to good works.

2. The

2. The regularity of their behaviour gave occaſion to a young gentleman of the college to ſay, "I think we have got a new ſet of *Methodiſts*:" alluding to a ſet of Phyſicians, who began to flouriſh at Rome about the time of Nero, and continued for ſeveral ages. The name was new and quaint: it clave to them immediately. And from that time both thoſe four young gentlemen, and all that had any religious connexion with them, were diſtinguiſhed by the name of *Methodiſts*.

3. In the four or five years following another and another were added to the number, till in the year 1735 there were fourteen of them who conſtantly met together. Three of theſe were Tutors in their ſeveral colleges; the reſt Batchelors of Arts, or Under-graduates. They were all preciſely of one judgment, as well as of one ſoul. All tenacious of order to the laſt degree, and obſervant, for conſcience ſake, of every rule of the church, and every ſtatute both of the univerſity and of their reſpective colleges. They were all orthodox in every point; firmly believing not only the three creeds, but whatſoever they judged to be the doctrine of the church of England, as contained in her articles and homilies. As to that practice of the apoſtolic church, (which continued till the time of Tertullian, at leaſt in many churches,) the *having all things in common*, they had no rule, nor any formed deſign concerning it. But it was ſo in effect, and it could not be otherwiſe

wiſe; for none could want any thing that another could ſpare. This was the infancy of the work. They had no conception of any thing that would follow. Indeed they took *no thought for the morrow*, deſiring only to live *to-day*.

4. Many imagined, that little Society would be diſperſed, and *Methodiſm* (ſo called) come to an end, when in October 1735, my Brother, Mr. Ingham, and I, were reduced by a ſtrange chain of providences, to go over to the new Colony in Georgia. Our deſign was to preach to the the Indian nation bordering upon that province. But we were detained at Savannah and Frederica, by the importunity of the people; who, having no other miniſters, earneſtly requeſted, that we would not leave them. After a time, I deſired the moſt ſerious of them to meet me once or twice a week at my houſe. Here were the rudiments of a *Methodiſt* Society: but notwithſtanding this, both my Brother and I were as vehemently attached to the church as ever, and to every rubric of it: inſomuch that I would never admit a Diſſenter to the Lord's ſupper, unleſs he would be re-baptized. Nay, when the Lutheran miniſter of the Saltzburghers at Ebenezer, being at Savannah, deſired to receive it, I told him, I "did not dare to adminiſter it to him, becauſe I looked upon him as unbaptized; as I judged baptiſm by laymen to be invalid: and ſuch I counted all that were not epiſcopally ordained."

5. Full

5. Full of these sentiments, of this zeal for the church, (from which I bless God, he has now delivered me) I returned to England in the beginning of February, 1738. I was now in haste to retire to Oxford, and bury myself in my beloved obscurity. But I was detained in London, week after week, by the Trustees for the Colony of Georgia. In the meantime I was continually importuned to preach in one and another church, and that not only morning, afternoon, and night, on Sunday, but on week-days also. As I was lately come from a far country, vast multitudes flocked together. But in a short time, partly because of those unwieldy crouds, partly because of my unfashionable doctrine, I was excluded from one and another church, and at length shut of all. Not daring to be silent, after a short struggle between honour and conscience, I made a virtue of necessity, and preached in the middle of Moorfields. Here were thousands upon thousands, abundantly more than any church could contain: and numbers among them, who never went to any church or place of public worship at all. More and more of them were cut to the heart, and came to me all in tears, enquiring with the utmost eagerness, "what they must do to be saved?" I said, "If all of you will meet on Thursday evening, I will advise you as well as I can." The first evening about twelve persons came; the next week, thirty or forty. When they were increased to about an hundred, I took down their names and places of abode, intending, as often as

it

it was convenient, to call upon them at their own houſes. Thus, without any previous plan or deſign, began the *Methodiſt* ſociety in England:—a company of people aſſociating together, to help each other to work out their own ſalvation.

6. The next ſpring we were invited to Briſtol and Kingſwood, where likewiſe Societies were quickly formed. The year following we went to Newcaſtle-upon-Tyne, and preached to all the colliers and keelmen round it. In 1744 we went thro' Cornwall, as far as Sennan, near the Land's End; and in the compaſs of two or three years more, to almoſt every part of England. Some time after we were deſired to go over to Ireland, and in proceſs of time, to every county therein. Laſt of all we were invited to Muſſelborough, Glaſgow, and ſeveral other parts of Scotland. But it was in Edinburgh, Glaſgow, Dundee, Arbroath, and Aberdeen, that we ſaw the greateſt fruit of our labour.

II. 1. Such was the riſe, and ſuch has been the progreſs of *Methodiſm*, from the beginning to the preſent time. But you will naturally aſk, What is *Methodiſm?* What does this new word mean? Is it not a new religion? This is a very common, nay, almoſt an univerſal ſuppoſition. But nothing can be more remote from the truth. It is a miſtake all over. *Methodiſm*, ſo called, is the old religion, the religion of the bible, the religion of the primitive church, the

the religion of the church of England. This *old religion* (as I obſerved in the earneſt appeal to men of reaſon and religion) is "no other than love, the love of God and of all mankind; the loving God with all our heart, and ſoul, and ſtrength, as having firſt loved *us*, as the fountain of all the good we have received, and of all we ever hope to enjoy; and the loving every ſoul which God hath made, every man on earth as our own ſoul. This love is the greateſt medicine of life, the never-failing remedy for all the evils of a diſordered world, for all the miſeries and vices of men. Wherever this is, there are virtue and happineſs going hand in hand. There is humbleneſs of mind, gentleneſs, long-ſuffering, the whole image of God, and at the ſame time a peace that paſſeth all underſtanding, with joy unſpeakable and full of glory. This religion of love, and joy, and peace, has its ſeat in the inmoſt ſoul, but is ever ſhewing itſelf by its fruits, continually ſpringing up, not only in all innocence; (for love worketh no ill to his neighbour) but likewiſe in every kind of beneficence, ſpreading virtue and happineſs all around it."

2. This is the *religion of the bible*, as no one deny, who reads it with any attention. It is the religion which is continually inculcated therein, which runs through both the old and new teſtament. Moſes and the prophets, our Bleſſed Lord and his apoſtles proclaim with one voice, "Thou ſhalt "love the Lord thy God with all thy ſoul, "and

" and thy neighbour as thyſelf." The bible declares, " Love is the fulfilling of the " law, the end of the commandment," of all the commandments which are contained in the oracles of God. The inward and outward fruits of this love are alſo largely deſcribed by the inſpired writers. So that whoever allows the ſcripture to be the word of God, muſt allow this to be true religion.

3. This is the *religion of the primitive church*, of the whole church in the pureſt ages. It is clearly expreſſed even in the ſmall remains of Clemens Romanus, Ignatius, and Polycarp. It is ſeen more at large in the writings of Tertullian, Origen, Clemens Alexandrinus, and Cyprian. And even in the fourth century, it was found in the works of Chryſoſtom, Baſil, Ephrem Syrus, and Macarius. It would be eaſy to produce a cloud of witneſſes teſtifying the ſame thing; were not this a point which no one will conteſt, who has the leaſt acquaintance with chriſtian antiquity.

4. And this is the *religion of the church of England*, as appears from all her authentic records, from the uniform tenor of her liturgy, and from numberleſs paſſages in her homilies. The ſcriptural primitive religion of love, which is now reviving throughout the three kingdoms, is to be found in her morning and evening ſervice, and in her daily as well as occaſional prayers: and the whole of it is beautifully ſummed up in that one, comprehenſive petition, " Cleanſe the thoughts of our hearts by the inſpirati-

on of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name."

5. Permit me to give a little fuller account, both of the progreſs and nature of this religion, by an extract from a treatiſe which was publiſhed many years ago.*

"Juſt at the time when we wanted little of filling up the meaſure of our iniquities, two or three clergymen of the church of England began vehemently to call ſinners to repentance. Many thouſands gathered together to hear them: and in every place where they came, many began to ſhew ſuch a concern for religion, as they never had done before. Many were in a ſhort time deeply convinced of the number and heinouſneſs of their ſins; of their evil tempers, of their inability to help themſelves, and of the inſignificancy of their *outſide religion*. And from this repentance ſprung fruits meet for repentance: the whole form of their life was changed. They *ceaſed to do evil, and learned to do well*. Neither was this all; but over and above this outward change, they began to experience *inward religion*. The love of God was ſhed abroad in their hearts, which they enjoy to this day. They *love him, becauſe he firſt loved us*; and this love conſtrains them to love all mankind, and inſpires them with every holy and heavenly temper, with the mind which was in Chriſt. Hence it is, that they are now uniform

* Farther Appeal, Part III.

uniform in their behaviour, unblameable in all manner of converſation, and in whatſoever ſtate they are, they have learned therewith to be content. Thus they calmly travel on through life, never repining, or murmuring, or diſſatisfied, till the hour comes, that they ſhall drop this covering of earth, and return to the Father of ſpirits."

6. This revival of religion has ſpread to "ſuch a degree, as neither we nor our fathers had known." How *extenſive* has it been? There is ſcarce a conſiderable town in the kingdom, where ſome have not been made witneſſes of it. It has ſpread to every age and ſex, to moſt orders and degrees of men: and even to abundance of thoſe who in time paſt were accounted monſters of wickedneſs."

Conſider the *ſwiftneſs* as well as the extent of it. "In what age has ſuch a number of ſinners been recovered in ſo ſhort a time from the error of their ways? When has true religion, I will not ſay ſince the reformation, but ſince the time of Conſtantine the Great, made ſo large a progreſs in any nation, within ſo ſmall a ſpace? I believe, hardly can either ancient or modern hiſtory afford a parallel inſtance."

7. "We may likewiſe obſerve the *depth* of the work ſo extenſively and ſwiftly wrought. Multitudes have been throughly convinced of ſin; and ſhortly after ſo filled with joy and love, that whether they were in the body, or out of the body, they could

hardly tell. And in the power of this love they have trampled under-foot whatever the world accounts either terrible or desirable, having evidenced in the severest trials, an invariable and tender good-will to mankind, and all the fruits of holiness. Now so deep a repentance, so strong a faith, so fervent a love, and so unblemished holiness, wrought in so many persons in so short a time, the world has not seen for many ages."

8. "No less remarkable is the *purity* of the religion, which has extended itself so deeply and swiftly: I speak particularly as to the doctrines held by those who are the subjects of it. Those of the church of England at least must acknowledge this. For where is there a body of people, who, number for number, so closely adhere to the doctrines of the church?

"Nor is their religion more pure from *heresy*, than it is from *superstition*. In former times, wherever any unusual religious concern has appeared, there has sprung up with it a *zeal* for things that were no part of religion. But it has not been so in the present case: no stress has been laid on any thing, as though it was necessary to salvation, but what is plainly contained in the word of God. And of the things contained therein, the stress laid on each has been in proportion to the nearness of its relation to what is there laid down as the sum of all; the love of God and our neighbour. So pure both from superstition and error, is the

the religion which has lately ſpread in this nation.

9. "It is likewiſe *rational*. It is as pure from *enthuſiaſm* as from ſuperſtition. It is true, the contrary has been continually affirmed. But to affirm is one thing; to prove is another. Who will prove, that it is *enthuſiaſm* to love God? Yea, to love him with all our heart? Who is able to make good this charge, againſt the love of all mankind? (I do but juſt touch on the general heads.) But if you cannot make it good, own this religion, to be ſober, manly, rational, divine.

10. "It is alſo pure from *bigotry*. Thoſe who hold it are not bigotted to *opinions*. They would hold right opinions: but they are peculiarly cautious, not to reſt the weight of chriſtianity there. They have no ſuch over-grown fondneſs for any opinions, as to think thoſe alone will make them chriſtians; or to confine their affection, or eſteem, to thoſe that agree with them therein. Nor are they bigotted to any particular branch even of practical religion. They are not attached to one point more than another; they aim at uniform, univerſal obedience. They contend for nothing circumſtantial, as if it were eſſential to religion, but for every thing in its own order.

11. "They dread that *bitter zeal*, that ſpirit of *perſecution*, which has ſo often accompanied the ſpirit of reformation. They do not approve of uſing any kind of vio-

lence, on any pretence, in matters of religion. They allow no method of bringing any to the knowledge of the truth, except the methods of reaſon and perſuaſion. And their practice is conſiſtent with their profeſſion. They do not in fact hinder their dependents, from worſhipping God, in every reſpect according to their own conſcience."

But if theſe things are ſo, may we not well ſay, *What hath God wrought?* For ſuch a work, if we conſider the *extenſiveneſs* of it, the *ſwiftneſs* with which it has ſpread, the *depth* of the religion ſo ſwiftly diffuſed, and its *purity* from all corrupt mixtures; we muſt acknowledge, cannot eaſily be paralleled, in all theſe concurrent circumſtances, by any thing that is found in the Engliſh annals, ſince chriſtianity was firſt planted in this iſland.

12. It may throw conſiderable light upon the nature of this work, to mention one circumſtance more, attending the preſent revival of religion, which I apprehend is quite peculiar to it. I do not remember to have either ſeen, heard, or read of any thing parallel. It cannot be denied, that there have been ſeveral conſiderable revivals of religion in England ſince the reformation. But the generality of the Engliſh nation were little profited thereby: becauſe they that were the ſubjects of thoſe revivals, preachers as well as people, ſoon ſeparated from the eſtabliſhed church, and formed themſelves into a diſtinct ſect. So did the *Preſbyterians* firſt, afterwards the

Inde-

Independents, the *Anabaptiſts*, and the *Quakers*. And after this was done, they did ſcarce any good, except to their own little body. As they choſe to ſeparate from the Church, ſo the people remaining therein, ſeparated from them, and generally contracted a prejudice againſt them. But theſe were immenſely the greateſt number: ſo that by that unhappy ſeparation, the hope of a general, national reformation was totally cut off.

13. But it is not ſo in the preſent revival of religion. The *Methodiſts* (ſo termed) know their calling. They weighed the matter at firſt, and upon mature deliberation, determined to continue in the church. Since that time they have not wanted temptations of every kind to alter their reſolution. They have heard abundance ſaid upon the ſubject, perhaps all that can be ſaid. They have read the writings of the moſt eminent pleaders for ſeparation, both in the laſt and preſent century. They have ſpent ſeveral days in a general conference upon this very queſtion, "Is it *expedient*, (ſuppoſing, not granting, that it is *lawful*) to ſeparate from the eſtabliſhed church?" But ſtill they could ſee no ſufficient cauſe to depart from their firſt reſolution. So that their fixed purpoſe is, Let the clergy or laity uſe them well or ill, by the grace of God, to endure all things, to hold on their even courſe, and to continue in the church, maugre men or devils, unleſs God permits them to be thruſt out.

14. Near

14. Near twenty years ago, immediately after their ſolemn conſultation on the ſubject, a clergyman who had heard the whole, ſaid with great earneſtneſs, "In the name of God, let nothing move you to recede from this reſolution. God is with you of a truth: and ſo he will be, while you continue in the church. But whenever the Methodiſts leave the church, God will leave them." Lord, what is man! In a few months after, Mr. Ingham himſelf left the church, and turned all the ſocieties under his care, into congregations of *Independents*. And what was the event? The ſame that he had foretold. They ſwiftly mouldered into nothing.

Some years after, a perſon of honour told me, "This is the peculiar glory of the Methodiſts. However convenient it might be, they will not on any account or pretence whatever, form a diſtinct ſect or party. Let no one rob you of this glorying." I truſt none will as long as I live. But the giver of this advice, entirely forgot it in a very ſhort time, and has almoſt ever ſince been labouring to form *Independent* congregations.

15. This has occaſioned many to aſk, "Why do you ſay, The *Methodiſts* form no diſtinct party? That they do not leave the church? Are there not thouſands of Methodiſts who have in fact left the church? Who never attend the church-ſervice? Never receive the Lord's ſupper there? Nay, who ſpeak againſt the church, even with bitterneſs, both in public and private?

private? Yea, who appoint and frequent meetings for divine ſervice, at the ſame hour? How then can you affirm, that the Methodiſts do not leave the church?"

I am glad of ſo public an opportunity of explaining this: in order to which it will be neceſſary to look back ſome years. The Methodiſts at Oxford were all one body, and as it were one ſoul; zealous for the religion of the bible, of the primitive church, and in conſequence, of the church of England; as they believed it to come nearer the ſcriptural and primitive plan, than any other national church upon earth.

When my Brother and I returned from Georgia, we were in the ſame ſentiments. And at that time, we and our friends were the only perſons to whom that innocent name was affixed. Thus far therefore all the *Methodiſts* were firm to the church of England.

16. But a good man who met with us when we were at Oxford, while he was abſent from us converſed much with Diſſenters, and contracted ſtrong prejudices againſt the church. I mean Mr. Whitefield: and not long after, he totally ſeparated from *us*. In ſome years William Cudworth and ſeveral others ſeparated from him, and turned *Independents:* as did Mr. Maxfield, and a few more after ſeparating from us. Laſtly, a ſchool was ſet up near Trevecka in Wales: and almoſt all who were educated there, (except thoſe that

were

were ordained, and ſome of them too) as they diſclaimed all connexion with the Methodiſts, ſo they diſclaimed the Church alſo. Nay, they ſpoke of it upon all occaſions, with exquiſite bitterneſs and contempt.

Now let every impartial perſon judge, whether we are accountable for any of theſe! None of theſe have any manner of connexion with the original Methodiſts. They are branches broken off from the tree: if they break from the church alſo, we are not accountable for it.

Theſe therefore cannot make our glorying void, That we do not, will not form any ſeparate ſect, but from principle remain, what we always have been, true members of the church of England.

17. Brethren, I preſume the greater part of you alſo are members of the church of England. So at leaſt you are called: but you are not ſo indeed, unleſs you are witneſſes of the religion above deſcribed. And are you really ſuch? Judge not one another; but every man look into his own boſom. How ſtands the matter in your own breaſt? Examine your conſcience before God. Are *you* an happy partaker of this ſcriptural, this truly primitive religion? Are you a witneſs of the religion of love? Are you a lover of God and all mankind? Does your heart glow with gratitude to the giver of every good and perfect gift? The Father of the ſpirits of all fleſh,

who

who giveth you life, and breath, and all things? Who hath given you his Son, his only Son, that you *might not perish, but have everlasting life*. Is your soul warm with benevolence to all mankind? Do you long to have all men virtuous and happy? And does the constant tenor of your life and conversation bear witness of this? Do you *love, not in word only, but indeed and in truth?* Do you persevere in the *work of faith, and the labour of love?* Do you *walk in love, as Christ also loved us, and gave himself for us?* Do you, as you have time, *do good unto all men?* And in as high a degree as you are able? *Whosoever* thus *doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.* Whosoever thou art whose heart is herein as my heart, give me thine hand. Come, and let us magnify the Lord together, and labour to promote his kingdom upon earth. Let us join hearts and hands in this blessed work, in striving to bring glory to God in the highest, by establishing peace and good-will among men, to the uttermost of our power. First let our hearts be joined herein: let us unite our wishes and prayers: let our whole soul pant after a general revival of pure religion and undefiled, of the restoration of the image of God, pure love, in every child of man. Then let us endeavour to promote in our several stations, this scriptural, primitive religion: let us with all diligence diffuse the religion of love among all we have any intercourse with: let us provoke

all

all men, not to enmity and contention, but to love and to good works: always remembering thoſe deep words, (God engrave them on all our hearts!) God is love: and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him!

FINIS.